I. PURPOSE

In today’s environment, law enforcement and the communities they serve should take bomb threats seriously. While many bomb threats are later determined to be hoaxes, law enforcement must respond to these threats and take appropriate action. Bomb threats may be received from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to telephone, voice over Internet protocol (VOIP), email, gaming devices, or other forms of digital or online communication.

This document is intended to provide agencies with items for consideration when developing their policies regarding bomb threats and response.

II. POLICY

Agencies may wish to develop a policy statement to outline the agency’s overall policy on officer response to bomb threats or explosive device located situations. However, this statement should take into consideration the potentially sensitive nature of bomb response procedures.

Sample: It is the policy of this law enforcement agency that all responses to bomb threats or explosive device located situations be conducted systematically, efficiently, and in a manner that gives primary consideration to the protection of human life.

III. DEFINITIONS

Bomb Threat: A situation where an explosive device has been reported or is suspected to be at a given location.

Explosive Device Located: When a suspected or actual explosive device has been located or has been detonated.

IV. PROCEDURES

When developing their policies and guidance related to response to bomb threats or explosive device located situations, agencies should identify and develop procedures that specifically address the following.

A. Pre-Planning

Prior to receipt of a bomb threat or notification of an explosive device located situation, agencies should do the following:

1. Identify potential stakeholders to include:
   - authorized bomb squad units,
   - authorized fire and rescue units,
   - HAZMAT teams,
   - canine teams,
   - chief executive officer/designated command officer,
   - public information officer,
   - cyber and/or communications technology investigative specialists,
   - fusion center personnel,
   - criminal investigations personnel, and
   - emergency medical facilities.

2. Coordinate with stakeholders to include, but not be limited to:
   - establishing shared procedures,
   - addressing what information will be provided and who will be responsible for providing such information to the public and media regarding bomb threats or explosive device located situations, and
   - developing and implementing multiagency training protocols.

3. Identify threat targets, such as, but not limited to:
   - airports,
   - mass transit locations such as subways,
   - schools,
   - places of religious worship,
   - government buildings,
   - companies or organizations, and
   - prominent individuals.

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1 For the purposes of this document, stakeholders refer to the individuals and entities who are responsible for the direct response to a bomb threat.
4. Conduct outreach to potential threat targets to provide information and guidance related to
   - information to collect if a threat is received,
   - actions to take if a threat is received or an explosive device is located, and
   - agency policy and procedures regarding threat response.

B. Receiving Threats
   When receiving bomb threats, law enforcement personnel responsibilities may include
   1. Identify the communications medium used to convey the threat.
   2. When receiving bomb threats via real-time voice communications (e.g. telephone, VOIP)
      - Asking who placed the device
      - Keeping the reporting party on the line as long as possible.
      - Attempting to obtain the following information:
        o Identity of the caller
        o Whether the caller is a member of any organization and, if so, which one
        o Location of the device with as much detail as possible
        o When the device has or will be detonated
        o Type of device involved
        o What the device looks like
        o What will trigger the device to detonate (e.g., radio signal, time delay, fuse)
        o Why the device was placed
     - Being alert to:
       o Exact wording of the threat
       o Estimated traits of the caller, including gender and age
       o Characteristics of the caller’s voice, such as an accent
       o Nature of any background noises (e.g., typing on a keyboard, gaming devices, discussions).
   3. When receiving threats via digital means, such as social media or email
      - Gathering all information available about the platform or service used to carry the threat message.
      - Preserving evidence, to include not deleting the message and capturing a screenshot.
      - Attempt to determine the origin and context of the message.
   4. When receiving reports from individuals or organizations that have received bomb threats,
      - Collecting information regarding the
        o individual who made the threat, such as,
          - type of communication device (phone, VoIP, email);
          - identity of the caller;
          - who placed the device;
          - what will cause the device to detonate;
          - address; and
          - telephone number, if applicable;
        o device, such as,
          - location,
          - time of detonation, and
          - appearance;
        o nature of the threat described; and
        o identity of the perpetrator(s).
     - Providing instructions to the individual reporting receipt of a threat. These may include
       o when the explosive device has been located, indicating that the device should remain undisturbed until law enforcement or other emergency personnel arrive; and
       o if no explosive device has been identified, alerting employees and others to be aware of unusual parcels or items on the premises.
   5. Dispatching requisite patrol units and emergency personnel.
   6. Making required notifications to the appropriate individuals and agencies, such as the field supervisor, designated officer in charge (OIC), and/or other local, state, provincial, or federal law enforcement agencies.

C. Threat Assessment
   Agencies should utilize available information to conduct a threat assessment. This may include
   1. Establishing roles and responsibilities to avoid gaps and overlaps.
   2. Categorizing the threat.

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2 For additional information, please see United States Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Bombing Prevention website at https://www.dhs.gov/what-to-do-bomb-threat.
3. Creating a mechanism to grade threats. This should include assessments related to the
- veracity of the information provided,
- seriousness of potential harm,
- likelihood/seriousness of intent,
- motivation behind the threat, and
- credibility of the threat (e.g., is it real or a hoax).

4. Deconflicting with information-sharing bodies, such as fusion centers, to
- identify if similar and/or simultaneous threats have been received,
- compare details, and
- recognize patterns.

5. Identifying vulnerabilities of equipment and personnel.

6. Determining if the threat is the result of fraud or hoax.

D. Bomb Threat Response

If a response is indicated after a threat assessment has been conducted, agencies should develop
procedures guiding officer response. These may include procedures related to the following:

1. Responding officers’ responsibilities, to include guidance regarding
   - Use of portable radios and other portable communication devices, to include
     cellular telephones. It is recommended that officers avoid using these devices
     within 300 feet of the location in question, as some explosive devices may be
     detonated by stronger radio signals.
   - Confirmation of information obtained by communication personnel.
   - Acquisition of additional information from and about the individual who
     received the threat, such as
     o previous threats,
     o possible motives and/or suspects, and
     o vulnerabilities of equipment and personnel.
   - Notification of a supervisory officer and ensuring that contact is maintained with
     this individual until they arrive on the scene.
   - Establishment and security of a suitable perimeter when an explosive device is
     located.

2. Response to bomb threats, to include the following:
   - Establishing who should be contacted
   - Determining who has the authority and responsibility to determine if a search is
     conducted, whether an evacuation should occur, or when individuals may reenter the
     location during a bomb threat
     o This should include contacting the building’s management, to include
       owners or other responsible persons.
     o Available information should be provided to building management to
       assist them in making decisions.
   - Guiding how officers should proceed if the decision is made by building management
     not to search to the location
     o In most instances, no action is necessary in this situation except for
       standardized agency reporting requirements. However, information may
       be developed that results in exigent circumstances that justify a search.
     o If a suspected or actual explosive device has been located, an evacuation
       should be directed regardless of the desires of the building management.
   - Directing how officers should conduct searches, including
     o Utilizing the direct assistance of employees or others who are knowledgeable of the
       contents and layout of the building.
     o Requesting the assistance of a bomb detection canine and/or bomb squad
       personnel.
     o Developing a search plan to identify the extent of the search depending
       upon the type of establishment, the motivation of the perpetrator, and
       accessibility of the building.
     o Obtaining a floor plan.
     o Alerting to items considered common indicators that there may be explosives
       at the location, while understanding that absence of these items does not
       assure that no bomb is present. These items may include
       - explosives-related pamphlets, periodicals, and books;
       - excessive amounts of galvanized
         or PVC pipe and end caps, especially if they have drill holes in
         the pipe or cap;
       - low-explosive powders or other
         incendiary mixtures;
- fuses of any type to include homemade burning fuses, such as string soaked in a burning powder;
- electrical switches, electrical matches, blasting caps, or similar initiators; and
- pressure vessels, such as pressure cookers.

E. Explosive Device Response

Agencies should develop procedures for situations where an explosive device has been located or paraphernalia has been identified. These may include the following:

1. Instructing officers to
   - avoid moving or otherwise disturbing the device; and
   - refrain from using portable radios or other portable communication devices, such as cellphones, for communication within 300 feet of the device(s).
2. Conducting an immediate evacuation—ensuring individuals are moved to an area no less than 300 feet from the device.
3. Defining and securing the perimeter.
4. Establishing incident command.
5. Notifying the appropriate stakeholders.
6. Requesting assistance of the designated bomb squad unit.
7. Briefing investigators and bomb squad personnel.
8. Establishing who is responsible for command of the scene and functional authority to direct agency personnel, such as the OIC or bomb squad commander.
9. Determining if public notification is required.

F. Post-Explosion Investigations

If an explosive device is detonated, an investigation should be conducted. Agency policy and procedures for these investigations may include doing the following:

1. Establishing who has primary authority for the investigation, such as the designated bomb squad unit.
2. Determining responsibilities of this entity, including
   - checking the site for unconsumed explosives or secondary devices;
   - supervising evidence recovery in accordance with agency guidelines;
   - requesting the assistance of other agencies to determine the nature and construction of explosives and the identification of perpetrators;
   - coordinating with intelligence operations of the agency and those of state, provincial, and federal sources; and
   - assisting in the evaluation of evacuation procedures, area and perimeter security, and availability of emergency services.

G. Training

Agencies should determine the necessary training related to bomb threats and response. This may include specialized training for the following:

1. Communications personnel
2. Line officers
3. Supervisors
4. Bomb squad personnel
5. Community members, especially those who are associated with identified threat targets